

Ephrata Cloisters

and German Seventh Day Baptists



Then and Now

PREFACE

A personal tour, with story and pictures, through the Ephrata Cloisters in Lancaster County -- the Snow Hill Nunnery in Franklin County near Waynesboro, and the present day German Seventh Day Baptist Church in Salemville, Pa., near New Enterprise in Bedford County.

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Several detailed histories of the Ephrata Cloisters and the German Seventh Day Baptists are available to those interested; however, if you will stay with me for a little while, we will take a quick trip to the past and then to the present of this peculiar organization.. We will visit with people and personalities who are and who have been a part of this most interesting story. A visit by way of pictures will bring to life a bit of history that is a part of our heritage as American citizens.

Your writer and guide on this picture excursion has become a part of the story. As an ordained minister in the German Seventh Day Baptist Conference, the story and pictures are not imagination. They have become a part of my life and my service to others, and a part of my service to God. So don't lag behind. We'll visit, together, people and places that make up the German Seventh Day Baptists.

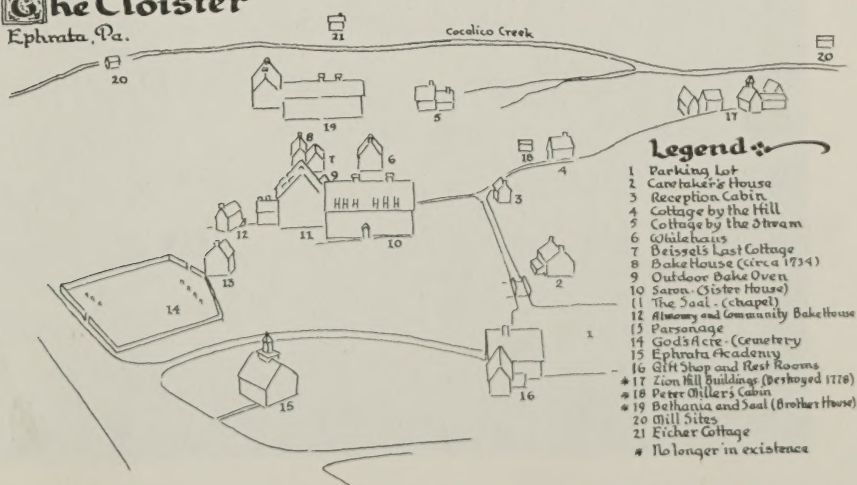
Where shall we start? As for places to see, the Ephrata Cloisters is the place to start.

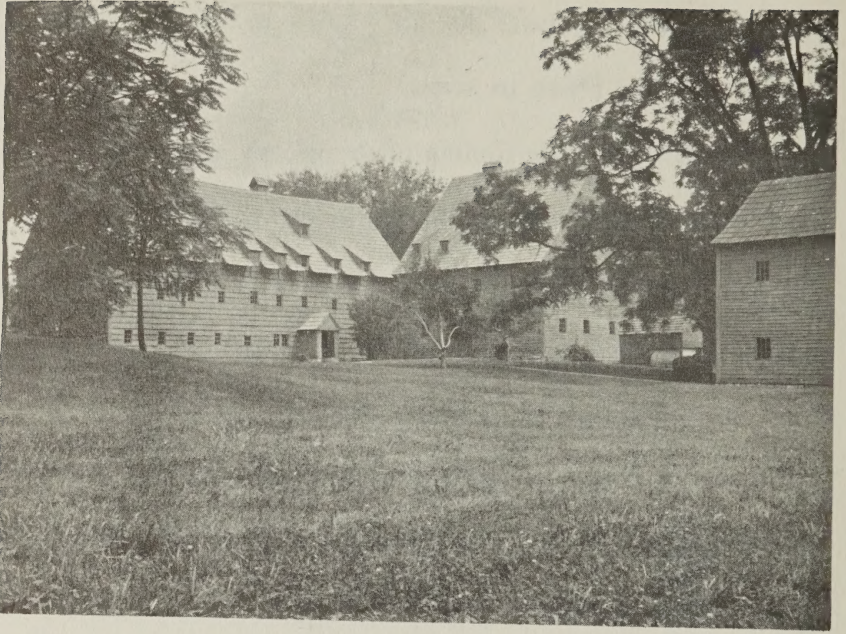
To get to the real beginning of things, we should remember the religious oppression in Europe in the 1600's and 1700's. This prompted a group of German dissenters to venture to a new unknown land. The group settled, at first, in what is now the Germantown section of Philadelphia.

With a new land and a new life ahead of them, they realized that they were not all of one accord. It seemed necessary to make still another separation.

Conrad Biesel and his followers, desiring to live a secluded life in study and worship to God, and believing that God had ordained, sanctified and blessed the seventh day as the Sabbath day of rest and worship, moved to Lancaster County along Calico Creek and established the Ephrata Cloisters.

The Cloister Ephrata, Pa.





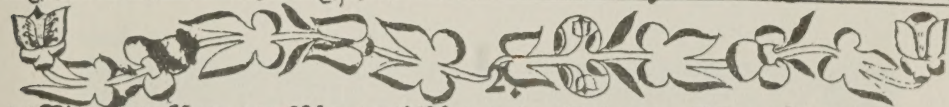
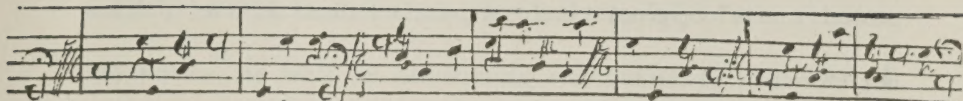
Here we are at the Ephrata Cloisters. This is where Conrad Bisel and those who followed him came to live a cloistered life. Although these people lived a secluded life, we can, by no stretch of the imagination, call the Brothers and Sisters isolationists. They were hard workers and servants of those around them. They were pioneers in industry, education, music, printing and farming. They were patriots beyond reproach, as General George Washington himself proclaimed.

We step out of the automobile and a beautiful, well-kept lawn stretches out before us. It certainly wasn't this way two hundred years ago. Undoubtedly, gardens and field crops covered the area since this was a self-supporting organization. The buildings look old but are in excellent condition. We can thank the Pennsylvania Historical Commission for the green carpet, fine walkways, restoration of the buildings, and the guided tours. The State Historical Commission is in full possession of the Cloister area and has made here an interesting and educational place for you and me to stop and learn of our American heritage.

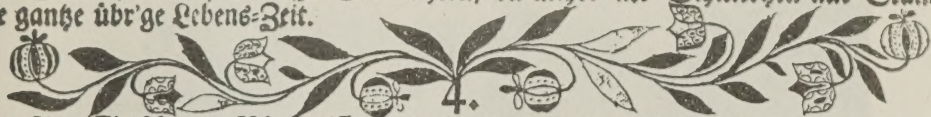


Let's walk in for a closer look. These folks in the long white robes and hoods are not vacationers. They are trying to relive for us the dress and fashion of the Brothers and Sisters who gave their lives fully to God here. The local Historical Society is also to be thanked for their untiring efforts in bringing to us a reproduction of not only the life and dress, but, more important, a pageant (at designated times only) of the unique music produced here in the early days of the Cloisters. Conrad Bisel was a first-rate musician and composer.





Und ob er schon gar schön ansblühet, und offenbar in Gottes Reich, daß man auch seine Früchte siehet, als wie am Paradieses-Zweig, so steht die Wurzel doch im Grunde, annoch in dieser Sterblichkeit, da nichts als Schmerzen alle Stunde die ganze übr'ge Lebens-Zeit.



Wann Fleisch und Blut will Rosen brechen, so wendet sich zur Erden hin, wo nichts als Fluch und Dornenstechen, und Schmerzen dem verliebten Sinn, weil er nicht weiß, daß ihm sein Leben in einer andern Welt ausgrünt, und was sich bar uns nicht kan geben, was zu dem heil'gen Sattseyn dient.

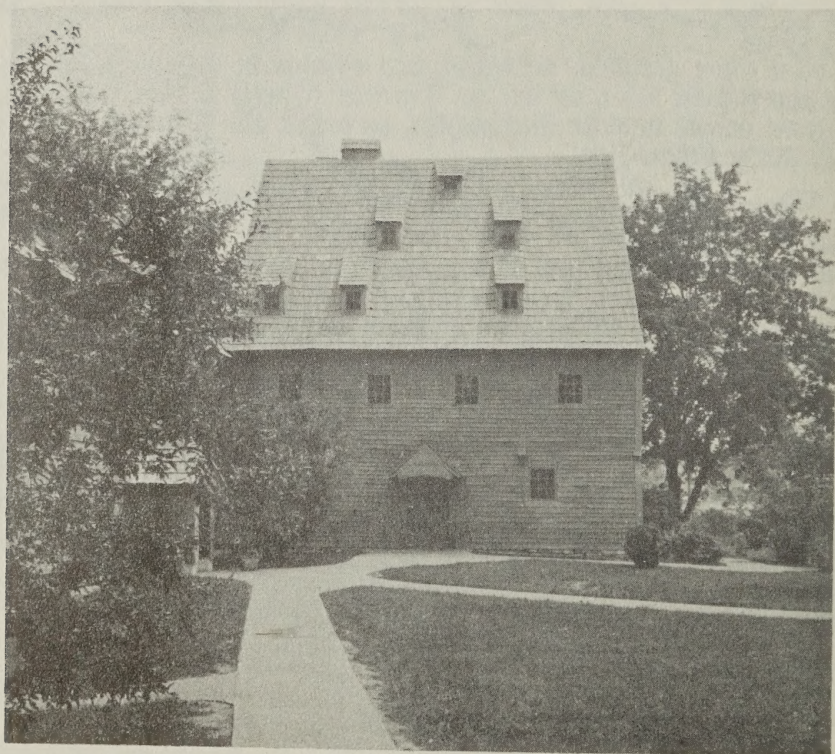


SPECIMEN PAGE FROM CHORAL BOOK

A COMBINATION OF TYPE, PEN AND ARTISTIC COLOR WORK. THE NOTES AND EMBELLISHMENTS ARE ALL PEN WORK.

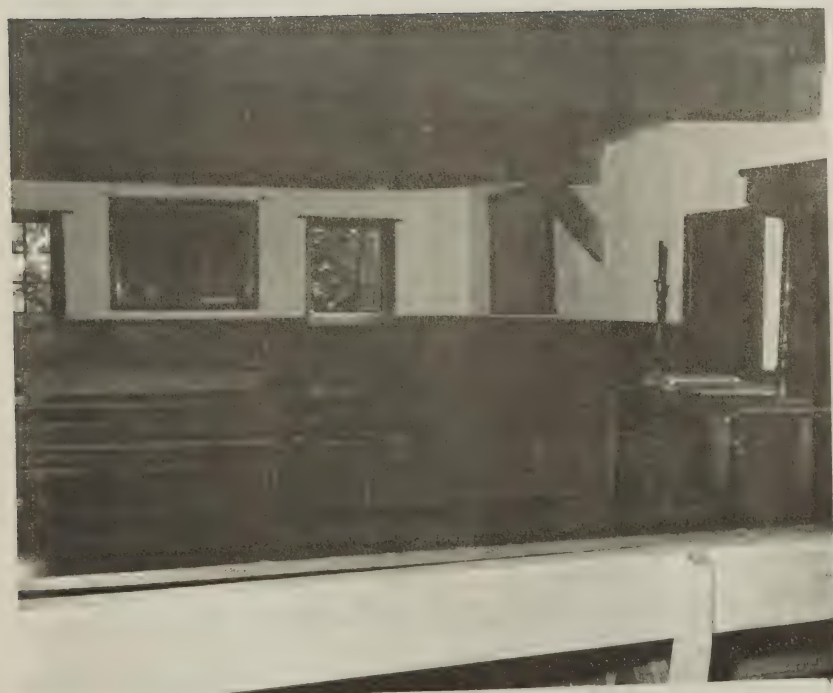
Of course, the folks here were German, and so the words to the music are also in that language. Recordings of this music are available at the Gift Shop next to the parking lot.

Let's take a closer look at this building. This is the Saal or meeting house. It is quite different from the church or synagogue of today, but then you must remember that this building is more than two and a quarter centuries old. It has been restored to its' original condition, rather than remodeled like our churches of today.



Now let's go inside and look around. We will see that the inside is as different from what we would expect as the outside. Watch your head--all the doors were purposely made low in order to teach humility.

Let's take a closer look at the tables and benches here in the Saal (meeting place or church sanctuary). They are certainly not like the pews in our churches today. The Brothers and Sisters did not come here to merely sit and listen. Their worship of God included studying and copying of manuscripts and books, as well as discussing and preaching the Word of God.





This is the room directly adjacent to the Saal.

You're right. Those wooden tubs you see were used for washing one another's feet as part of the communion service. The flat tray held the unleavened bread and the large cups were for the fruit of the vine. We are privileged to have at the existing German Seventh Day Baptist congregation exact duplicates of this complete set, and still use part of them in our regular communion services.

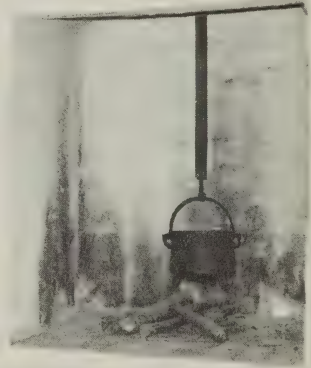
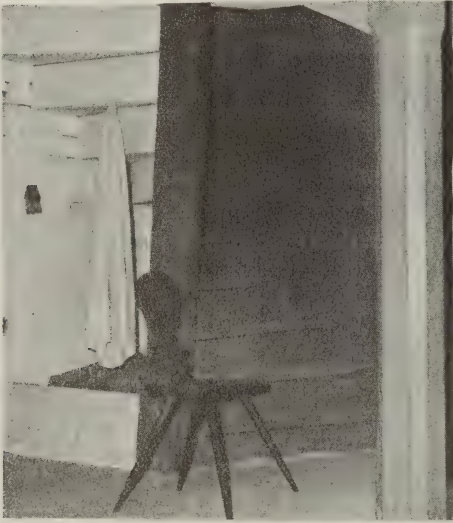
This building is the Sister House; in other words, this is where the Sisters slept, worked, and ate their meals.



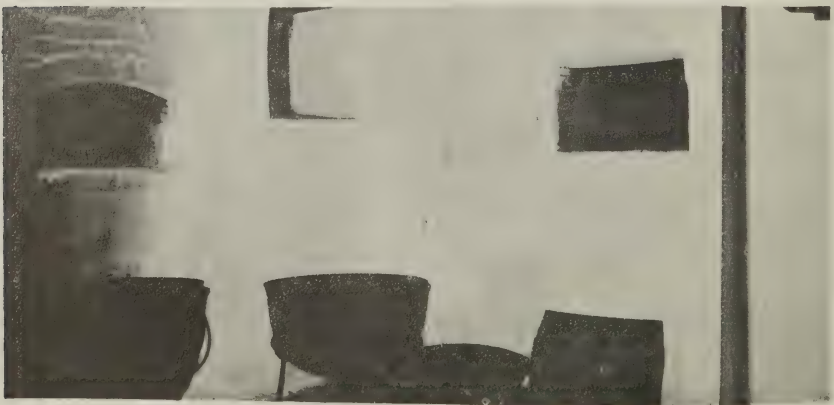
Speaking of sleeping, this is not a bench. It might have been at times but it also was a bed, and that block was the pillow. This bedroom was very fittingly called a "cell". Shouldn't we be thanking God right now for our comfortable homes and beds?



This is one of the rooms of the Sister House. Notice the winding stairway, the old furniture, the fireplace, and the low doorway. The fireplaces were, of course, the only heating system in these buildings. This was "Home, Sweet Home" for the Sisterhood.



Does this look like a bakery? This it is, and it probably did a better job than we might think.



Shall we stop outside for a breath of fresh air? Let's walk over here and look at the cemetery. They called it "God's Acre". We find that the leader and founder of the Cloisters, Conrad Bisel, died and was buried here in the year 1768. Peter Miller took over as leader, and from that day the decline of the settlement began.



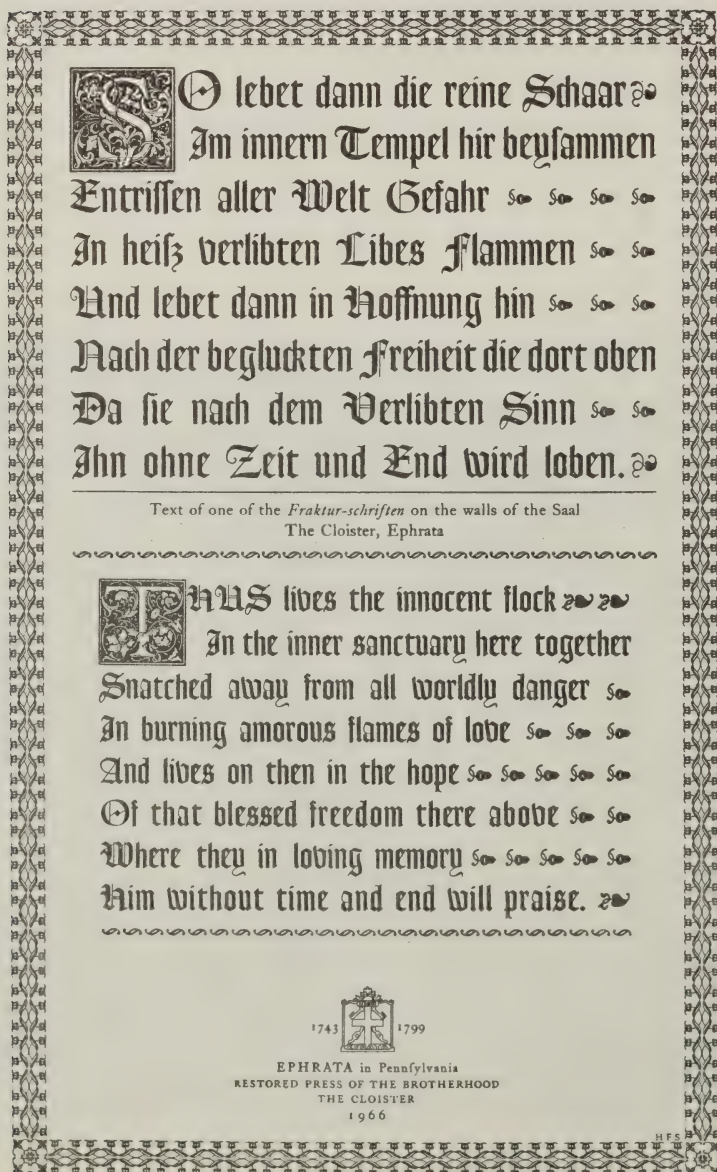
We cannot degrade Peter Miller because we probably owe much honor to this man for his part in the bringing together of the thirteen colonies into one United States, Here's the story: The Declaration of Independence, having been drawn up, was brought to Ephrata and there translated under the direction of Peter Miller into seven different languages, then sent on to the colonies so that they might read and understand exactly what they were fighting for and what they were fighting about. Peter Miller died in 1796.



As early as 1745 the Brethren set up their own printing press where they published a steady stream of religious tracts, hymnals, early currency for the new United States, and many other books. You would recognize one of their publications as Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Let's take a closer look at this unique printing press.



The expert workmanship of the printers was second to none. Here is a reproduction of an example of the extra time and effort that was exerted to insure that it was the best. Anything worth doing was worth doing right. Don't you think that is still true today?



If we could have been here 200 years ago, we would have been in the midst of a very busy place. These people were community servants, as well as being a self-sufficient community of their own. We would have seen a grist mill, a saw mill, a paper mill, a fulling mill, and a bark mill serving the needs of the Cloister and the surrounding settlers. Perhaps it was the printing press that made the greatest impact upon their time.



You may think that there were no married people living at the Cloisters, but that is not altogether true. Here is a cabin or home that was built especially for people who were married and still desired to be part of the Ephrata community. After all, married people can have a sincere desire to serve God and still care for their own families in this world; so there were married folks here.



Let's walk over here--it really isn't too far--and take a look at the Bethania, or Brother House. It was built in 1746 and was torn down some years ago. The State Historical Commission is now rebuilding the Brother House to look as it did then. The men who lived here were a self-sufficient group. They did their own cooking, baking, house cleaning, washing, and mending. They were also shoe makers, tailors, weavers, farmers, and orchard men. If you could only find one like that today!



You remember a few minutes ago we were talking about Peter Miller? Well, this house we are now passing...



was the building in which, it is claimed, Peter Miller translated the Declaration of Independence into the various languages of the people of the colonies.

Here is a Communion Set (one of several) presented by General George Washington to the Ephrata community in appreciation for the care given to wounded Revolutionary War Soldiers. The Sister House was turned into a hospital to care for the sick and wounded. The members of the Ephrata community did not participate in war, but they were certainly a patriotic people.



The German Seventh Day Baptists (as they were to become known) traveled in missionary journeys in all directions. One direction was Franklin County, Pennsylvania. At a unique spot about three miles from Waynesboro, called the Snow Hill Nunnery a permanent congregation was formed. As quickly as you turn this page we'll be there, but first let me tell you how they traveled in that day.

The horses were not plentiful, so the first day Group One started out on foot on this journey of well over one hundred miles. Sometime later, Group Two started on the available horses. They caught up with, and passed Group One and traveled to a predetermined spot where they left the horses to rest and set out on foot. At the time Group One found the horses, they were rested and ready to travel again. Now Group One rode around the walking Group Two, and so on, until they reached Snow Hill.



Here we are - and it sure beats walking, doesn't it? You remember the buildings back at Ephrata were constructed of wood. Now look around - bricks. Right. All of the buildings are of brick construction. It looks like one long building, and it is. It was built at three different construction periods. From this porch, one hundred years ago, you could have looked out over the dam and race which supplied water for the grist mill operated by the monastic society. Along with this and other buildings, there was a 160-acre farm which kept the brothers busy. The farm is still in production today.



Let's go around to the back of the building.



Unlike Ephrata,, this one building housed the brothers in one end, the sisters in the other end; in the center on the second floor was the saal or meeting room. A large dining room or work-room and kitchen was on the first floor.

Shall we go inside and get a closer look?

This is the Saal --the meeting room for worship, study and work. Many of the original furnishings are still here. Throughout this building we still discover many old clocks like the one over there on the side of the room. We will see a big Grandfather clock downstairs later.

Here at Snow Hill there was a Monastic Society which was made up entirely of unmarried men and women. There was also a congregation which met regularly. The married were members of the congregation. The congregation still exists today, while the Monastic Society faded away with the death of the last member in 1892.



The sisters made their own clothing from head to toe , so there were many spinning wheels in constant use.. Here are parts of several of the remaining unique machines. I guess we should tell you that this place is not open to the public at the present time; however, plans are being made to restore and open the buildings sometime in the future.

Before we go downstairs,,there is one more thing that I want to show you. So you will know what to do. --



And here it is - bedroom or "cell."



This, you will remember, is very much like the rooms back at Ephrata. It is about four feet wide and six or seven feet long. A board for a bed and a block for a pillow! Remember, they were not interested in luxury but rather in service to others. This was their way of serving God.

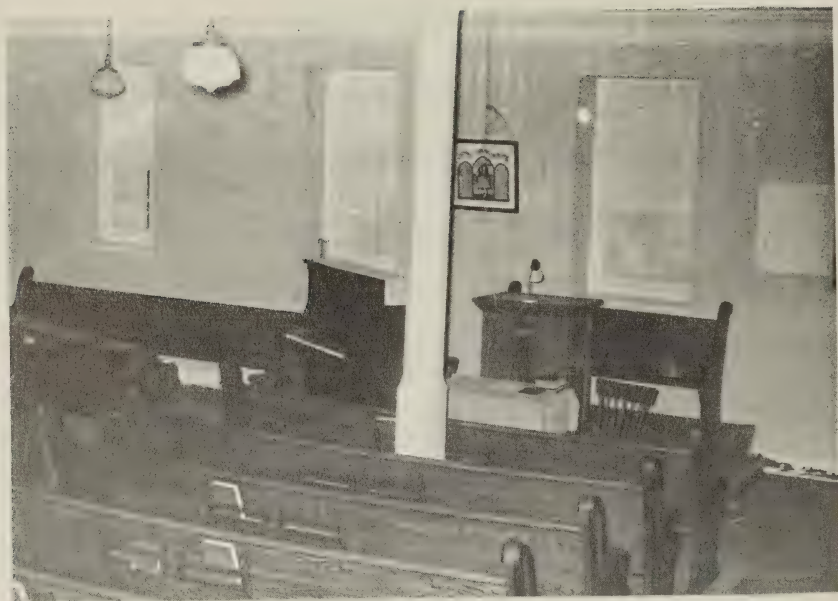
We are back downstairs now, and here is the Grandfather clock that I promised you. It runs and keeps time.

We will not go down to the basement, so I'll tell you what is down there - the best, freshest, cool spring water that ever refreshed a traveler or resident of this place.. It continues to bubble up out of the ground regardless of the conditions elsewhere.



Later, a separate church building was erected for worship services. Look at the two doors side by side - one for men and one for women. A partition extended from between these doors to the pulpit. The minister could see both men and women, but the men and women of the congregation could not see each other. This eliminated many problems and brought about a more attentive congregation. You see, celibacy was a requirement of the monastic society and this was just a little insurance.





As you can easily see, the partition has been removed and the church has been changed somewhat from the original. Services are still being conducted in this building, as there is a German Seventh Day Baptist congregation here. Your guide has had many pleasant experiences in this little church. I look forward to officiating at the Communion Service regularly. When passing by on a Sabbath (Saturday) morning, stop in for a visit.

In every story there is a love scene and so it applies now. Jacob and Lydia had entered into monastic life here at the nunnery where celibacy was a requirement. Of course, there was supposed to be no conversation between the male and female members of the order. Well - you guessed it -- Jacob and Lydia fell in love and found ways of sending notes to each other. Sometimes they would leave them at a specified place in the garden of the Community House. Soon they abandoned monastic life, were married, and moved to Salemville in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, to live as husband and wife. They worked together at farming in a community that was soon to build another German Seventh Day Baptist Church. The time is now about 1845. It was several days' journey from Snow Hill to Salemville across the rugged mountains of Pennsylvania. It is a pleasant drive today; however, time is running short, so just flip the page and . . .



we are here.



This is what the church looked like in 1848 when completed. Look again at the two doors side by side. Here again a partition separated the men and women.

Periodically hundreds of people gathered here for Love Feasts and Communion Services which lasted several days.

The brick for this church building was burnt or manufactured in the adjoining field.

We mentioned no printing press at Snow Hill, although they did a great deal of printing.

Here is a press that was moved to Salemville from Snow Hill. We are told that this press originally came from Ephrata. Rev. erend Frank R. King is pictured with the press. He purchased it and was sole owner until his death in 1963. Besides being pastor of this church, he operated the F.R. King Printing Company in New Enterprise. I have many pleasant memories and obtained a wealth of information and history from Mr. King as we talked in his print shop and as we traveled on many occasions between Salemville and Snow Hill.



Here at the Salemville Church we also have several prize possessions. To mention several: one of the Communion Sets presented by General George Washington to the Ephrata Community; furniture dating back to the origin of the church; Bibles that are well over a hundred years old printed in German and English; a fireplace for heating and for preparing food for the Love Feasts and Communion Services. There are many others.



This is the present-day church of which the writer has been pastor for the past eight years. As you can see, the building has been remodeled and is now a typical country church. Services are held regularly on Sabbath mornings with a faithful congregation from the surrounding community. For many people Sunday is just another working day in this area.

Take note that today one of the twin doors has been removed.



The inside of the church on Sabbath morning shows you that people and time change many things. We are thankful that, as a minority group, we can still worship God, unmolested, as we each in our own heart see fit.



Thanks for your participation in this journey. To get back home just turn the page.

Snow Hill Society
9400 ANTHONY HIGHWAY
WAYNESBORO, PA 17268